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School Board Vice President Stresses the Role of the Home

By JOSEPH WERSHBA

TO JAMES B. DONOVAN, the New York public school system—like the city itself—has long been something of a miracle. It's not that it hasn't always worked well, he says; it's a wonder that it has worked at all. "And our job is to make it work even better."

Donovan is the newly elected, unsalaried vice president of the city's brand new Board of Education. He's a 45-year-old insurance lawyer from Brooklyn, a graduate of Fordham and Harvard Law. A prematurely white-haired but powerfully built man, Donovan was a Navy underwater demolition man during World War II. He later played an important role in the OSS and CIA and was a prosecutor at the Nuremberg Nazi war crimes trials. He gained national prominence in 1959 when a federal judge assigned him the task of defending Col. Rudolf Abel—then Russia's chief espionage agent in the U. S.

Although his three eldest children attend parochial school (the fourth is still too young), Donovan has had long and intimate experience with the public school system. He served the last 10 years on the New York Art Commission, which passes on designs for all new school buildings. He has numerous other educational ties. But he is

dropping his job as secretary of the Art Commission in order to avoid any possible conflict of interest.

"One of our big problems in New York," he says, "is our enormously heterogeneous population. We have tens of thousands of people for whom English is a second language. Most people assume that this refers simply to Puerto Ricans. But that's not so. There are many thousands of others."

"Our task is to build these children into citizens of the future. We need the cooperation of the home, church or synagogue, and the other strong influences in the life of the child."

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James Britt Donovan is a slow-speaking but decisive man with a take-charge personality. His friends are confident that his talents and ambitions are in for fuller play in public life in the years ahead.

He apparently enjoys tough assignments, even though he was born in comfortable surroundings, the son of a prominent Bronx surgeon. Adversity



**James B.
Donovan**

has always been a challenge to Donovan—even from the day he was born. That was Feb. 29, 1916—which means that he's had only 11 birthdays so far. "Like Frederick in 'The Pirates of Penzance,'" he quips. "But people are very nice about it. Every time my birthday rolls around, they elect a President, hold Olympics—or something. Really, they make too much of it."

Donovan attended All Hallows Institute, a small private school, and won a competitive state scholarship which he used at Fordham. He was a competent all-around athlete and edited the yearbook. "I wanted to be a newspaperman but my father took a dim view," he says. "I think he had seen 'The Front Page' and was convinced that the editorial life was the surest road to communism. He told me to go to law school—but if I still wanted to be a newspaperman after that, he'd buy me a small town paper."

Donovan decided to stick with the law after finishing at Harvard, although he did get to represent newspapers in a legal capacity later on. "I still like to write my briefs in terse, one-syllable English," he says.

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During the war, Gen. William (Wild Bill) Donovan (no relation) chose him for his personal staff as general counsel to the OSS. "In 1944," Donovan recalls, "I became fascinated with what I thought was going to be one of the most difficult legal problems, arising out of the war: what do we do with Hitler, Himmler and Goebbels, for example, if we capture them? Do we simply shoot them? Do we—as in the case of Napoleon—exile them? Do we turn them over to the Germans for punishment? Or do we do nothing?"

"My outfit at the time was gathering evidence on Nazi war crimes. Through the underground, we were learning of the concentration camps and the mass murders. Later, I took over German film laboratories and put together all those concentration camp pictures."

Donovan accompanied Supreme Court Justice Jackson to London where the Nuremberg trials were set up by treaty with Russia, England and France. Then, at Nuremberg, Donovan was associate prosecutor in charge of visual evidence—that is, the actual presentation of Nazi atrocity films.

Two years ago, Donovan accepted one of the most personally difficult assignments of his career: the defense of Soviet spy Abel. Donovan's children became targets of taunts in school and he had to cut off his phone service for a while.

"It would seem so obvious that it's an inherent part of our way of life that everyone is entitled to a fair hearing," Donovan observed at the time. "I was amazed to find such hostility."

He turned the \$10,000 fee over to Fordham, Harvard and Columbia, saying: "The most effective means of combating totalitarianism lies in the furtherance of sound moral training and a true understanding of justice under law."

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